

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in international research: The GCRF Gender Equality Statement in view of definitions of equitable partnerships and understandings of diversity

Dr Romina Istratii, UKRI Future Leaders Fellow

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My background & relevant initiatives

- Critical international development researcher and practitioner with decade-long experience in developing decolonial/community-centred research and intervention approaches to address gender-related issues in religious societies of Africa.
- Initiated the Decolonising Research Initiative under the aegis of the SOAS Research Office with a conversation event that brought funders, institutions and research managers to apply a decolonial lens to research structures
- Previously co-coordinated the SOAS-OXFORD Research for Development (R4D) Series, which sought to change the narrative around development research and to encourage ethical, reflexive and dialogical research practices internationally
- Acted as SOAS's Research Funding Officer and then GCRF Project Officer, completing an internal review of research development processes and hindrances to 'equitable' international partnerships.
- Served as academic consultant on the genderEd/University of Edinburgh project 'Integrating Gender Equality into Global Challenges Research Fund Bids and Projects: Getting to Sufficiency'.

‘Equitable partnerships’ in GCRF funding

- Emphasis is placed on interdisciplinarity and partnerships-building through collaborative research projects involving researchers from the UK and aid recipient countries (DAC listed countries) to address global challenges.
- Co-production, capacity-building and equitable partnerships are funder priorities (GCRF Criteria 2017).
- These priorities align with emerging evidence that higher education research and international development practice has more impact when it is co-produced and co-authored (Adams and Gurney 2016; Fransman 2019).

Limitations/Gaps

Few directions have been provided as to how such egalitarian partnerships may be achieved (especially across cultural contexts and sectors).

Co-production and capacity-building are rife with epistemological, ethical and practical concerns that we need to look at more systematically.

Eligibility criteria, due diligence expectations and funding structures tend to place more decision-making power in the hands of the UK-based PI (e.g. GCRF Thematic Calls – although exceptions exist with some calls stipulating that PIs be from LMICs).



More fundamental questions to ask

- What is diversity? Within EDI policies emphasis is generally placed on protected characteristics
 - It is rarely recognised that these characteristics do not exist in isolation, but intersect in complex ways and need to be addressed together and multi-dimensionally.
 - Moreover, diversity is context-specific, which informs who is marginalised and who is favoured.
- How are EDI policies and approaches to be assessed? How can it be established that these are effective, especially in research practices abroad?

Intersections with gender equality standards require more attention

- Since 1 April 2019 researchers applying for funds to GCRF and Newton Fund calls are required to provide a gender equality statement that should ascertain that: Inequality is not perpetuated; The different rights and needs of all genders are recognised and addressed; People of different genders share the benefits of research and innovation projects.
- How egalitarian partnerships are to be achieved when teams are expected to be cross-cultural and thus imbricated in post-colonial power hierarchies and simultaneously comprised of researchers of multiple intersectional identities needs more thoughtful consideration.

A closer look: definition

- Places females and males within power relations and draws attention to the reproduction of these relations through political, institutional and normative frameworks (SEI Report 2018; Oxfam, 2019).
- Simultaneously re-affirms the historical gender-sex binary and departs from rigid demarcations by suggesting fluid conceptualisations (“GCRF Gender Equality Statement Guidance”)
- Suggests a departure from ideas of sameness: *“Women and others have the right to define for themselves the objectives of development and to seek outcomes which are not necessarily identical to those sought and enjoyed by men.”* (UKRI, “What is Gender and Gender Equality?”)
- Gender should be approached from an intersectional lens together with sexuality, race, ethnicity, age, economic, educational or other characteristics (Garcia Toolkit, 2019)

A closer look: scope

Researchers must:

- Discuss the considerations, steps and measures they have taken throughout the research process to ensure equal opportunity and to reduce the likelihood of amplifying existing gender asymmetries
- Consider gender relations and analyse impact, consequences and outputs in a gender-disaggregated manner

The guidance recognises that the extent and importance of gender-related considerations must be judged according to the nature of the project.

- However, even projects where gender is not a prominent factor need to justify why this is so in the specific areas of research.

Guidance cites toolkits combining organisational, institutional and international development contexts

Gender-sensitivity in Do No Harm principle

Gender-sensitivity in Do No Harm requires an in-depth understanding of gender dynamics. We recommend integrating the perspectives of women, men, and sexual and gender minorities into the analysis, by seeking out the relevant people, and by asking gender-specific questions where appropriate. Seek balance in representation and voice. Find contextual strategies to include hard-to-reach people, who often have unique and important perspectives.

Do No Harm & Gender Guidance Note, pg. 2



Do No Harm & Gender
A Guidance Note

Current *lacunae*

- 1) Gender Equality statement not contextualised in historical gender and development debates – how does it respond to the shortfalls and appropriations identified with **gender mainstreaming** approaches?
- 2) The scope and way to achieve gender-sensitive research not clearly specified within **post-colonial contexts** with an understanding of the colonial underpinnings of development **as the continuation of the ‘civilising mission.’**
- 3) To demonstrate **ODA compliance** researchers need to provide pathways to impact using gender-sensitive language – complexity of development impact not recognised or dealt with
- 4) **Interdisciplinarity** and **egalitarian partnerships** are anticipated to promote gender equality, and vice versa – limited recognition that teams are expected to be cross-cultural, diverse and imbricated in post-colonial power hierarchies
- 5) Guided by the SDGs, the GCRF and Newton Fund have not seemingly considered **ethical issues** that emerge in the mainstreaming of the SDGs abroad, with gender equality being one of the most controversial goals (Tomalin, Haustein, Kidy, 2018).

Additional epistemological and ethical issues informed by a decolonial perspective

- Gender equality is a **political objective** – whose gender equality, for what purposes, and where are the boundaries with research?
- The issue of **western Euro-centrism** in the definition of gender and conceptualisation of gender relations, by predicating gender on biology and visual indicators (Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí, 1997; Ifi Amadiume 1987, Arnfred 2011)
- Mainstream gender theory underpinned by the assumption of **hierarchical gender** – ignores plurality in gender relations and status of women across the world (Nkiru Uwechia Nzenzgwu, 2006)
- Definitions of gender, gender equality and empowerment can be **incommensurable with local belief and knowledge systems**, especially those embedded in religious metaphysics (Istratii, 2017)
- **Intersectionality** does not eschew epistemological issues – identity vectors usually defined as inequalities “essentialising the oppressed subject” (Cramer 2015), while non-discursive or spiritual planes are often neglected (Istratii, 2017)
- Interventions that pursue gender equality in ways not attuned to local belief and value systems can appear **neo-colonial, causing backlash** (Oluwafunmilayo Para-Mallam et al., 2011; Mannell, 2012)

How to respond to these issues

- It is important to recognise that gender-sensitivity is equally pertinent to the research process (design, implementation, dissemination, impact) and the research team's composition and *modus operandi vis-à-vis* local communities
- Gender-sensitive analysis that pays attention to intersectional identities requires trans-disciplinary and multidisciplinary theoretical perspectives and community-centred, participatory, multi-dimensional research methodologies

Questions to be guided by:

- Colonial legacies that favour the epistemology and theoretical framework of the UK-based researcher
 - How relevant are the theoretical frameworks, conceptualisations of impact or goals such as the SDGs to local priorities and understandings?
 - Who determines the narrative of the proposal?
- Composition of the team
 - Is the team diverse enough (females, females from LMICs, etc.)
 - What is the role of the partners in the LMICs?
 - How do they relate to the local communities of study?

Questions to be guided by (continued):

- Opportunities for contribution to research design and development
 - Are partners in LMICs just 'data collectors' or are they co-producers? (consider issues of access to data)
 - Are partners credited properly in the research and outputs?
 - Do team members have equal opportunities for growth (females/males, early career/senior researchers, urban/rural institutions, etc.)?
- Publication potential and impact locally
 - Who 'owns' the data collected and research produced?
 - Do partners in LMICs have the right to publish in local languages and platforms for direct impact on local society?

Questions to be guided by (final):

- Egalitarian partnerships are not limited to collaborative partnerships between UK-based principal investigators and international co-investigators.
- Research assistants, technicians, facilitators and others hired locally are also part of the team. The same principles should govern relations with them.
 - How are research assistants hired?
 - Are they properly credited?
 - Who are they and how do they relate to the local communities (strengths/limitations)?

Works for study on egalitarian partnerships:

- Adams, J., and A. K. Gurney. 2016. “The Implications of International Research Collaboration for UK Universities: Research assessment, knowledge capacity and the knowledge economy,” Digital Research Papers, <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/International/implications-research-digital-collaboration-uk-universities.pdf>
- Fransman, J. 2019. “Engaging with Research for Real Impact,” Bond. https://www.bond.org.uk/sites/default/files/resource-documents/bond_engaging_with_research_for_real_impact.pdf
- ESRC. “International co-investigator policy guidance,” <https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/inclusion-of-international-co-investigators-on-proposals/>
- GCRF Strategic Advisory Group. 2017. “Criteria for GCRF Funding,” <https://www.ukri.org/files/legacy/international/global-challenges-research-fundsagcriteria-pdf/>
- Stevano, S., and Deane, K. 2017. “The Role of Research Assistants in Qualitative and Cross-Cultural Social,” in Handbook of Research Methods in Health Social Sciences, pp 1-16, https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007%2F978-981-10-2779-6_39-1
- UKCDS. “Building Partnerships of Equals: The role of funders in equitable and effective international development collaborations,” https://www.ukcdr.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Building-Partnerships-of-Equals_-REPORT-2.pdf
- UKRI. “Promoting Fair and Equitable Research Partnerships to Respond to Global Challenges,” <https://www.ukri.org/files/international/fair-and-equitable-partnerships-final-report-to-ukri-sept-2018-pdf/>

Toolkits available to integrate gender- sensitivity in research:

- Integrating Gender in Research Planning, Oxfam
- Garcia Toolkit for Integrating Gender-Sensitive Approach into Research and Teaching, EU-Framework 7
- Integrating Gender Analysis in Research (IGAR) Tool, Gender-Net
- Gender Equality in Academia and Research (GEAR) Tool, European Institute for Gender Equality
- Integrating Gender and Social Equality into Sustainable Development Research: A Guidance Note, Stockholm Environment Institute
- GenderED, Doing gender sensitive research – tools and tips, <https://www.gender.ed.ac.uk/gender-sensitive-research/>

Open access resources on research ethics and decolonial reflexivity:

- SOAS Decolonising Research Initiative,
<https://www.soas.ac.uk/research/researchstrategy/decolonising-research-initiative/>
- SOAS Online Module “Ethical Reflexivity and Research Governance: Navigating the Tensions”,
<https://eprints.soas.ac.uk/32038>
- University of Sheffield, The Sheffield Institute for International Development: Research Ethics,
<http://siid.group.shef.ac.uk/research/research-ethics/>
- University of Oxford, Oxford Global Research,
<https://globalresearch.web.ox.ac.uk/>